

~~(U//FOUO)~~ History Today - 06 April 2009

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(U) In the last days of the war in Europe, Allied forces moved into southern Germany and bordering areas of Austria to prevent German forces from retreating into an Alpine redoubt where they could hold out and prolong the war for an indefinite period.

(U) The decision to deploy these Allied troops has been controversial since it was made. After the war, no evidence was found that any such Alpine retreat had been designed. With the advent of the Cold War, it was asserted that these troops could have been better used to keep the advancing Russians farther east in a divided Germany.

(U) This last charge is appealing to those who lived through the Cold War, but has little basis in fact. The top leadership of the United States, Great Britain, and the USSR had already agreed on the dividing line for the conquered country. After Germany surrendered, troops of each nation occupying German territory were redeployed to ensure that the actual borders of each zone matched those agreed to at Allied summits.

(U) In fact, SIGINT had a role in the controversial decision about the Alpine redoubt. There were some indications from ULTRA, the exploitation of German encrypted messages, that the Germans were preparing a defense perimeter in the German-Austrian Alps. The fact that these would be located near Berchtesgaden, where Hitler had a vacation residence, lent credence to this idea.

(U) In May 1944, ULTRA revealed the dimensions of a Lower Alps Defensive Position close to the Swiss border, which was to be constructed by the Tenth Army. In July, ULTRA revealed a Hitler order for construction of additional defense lines in the Lower Alps. Later German messages showed the expansion of a staff headquarters in the region.

(U) At the end of March, German commands ordered protection for bridges and railway lines from Germany to Italy and Yugoslavia on routes which passed through the area where a national redoubt was suspected. Messages (decrypted just before the German surrender) mentioned provisioning units in this area.

(U) Reconsidered after the war, the messages could be interpreted in other ways than wartime intelligence analysts had done. They probably referred to local defensive measures rather than a unified plan for construction of a special fortress. Given the mountainous terrain, the use of a landline network for much German communication, and the lack of collateral intelligence due to the location's remoteness, many pieces of information that would have aided better analysis probably were not intercepted in the first place.

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